

Congressmen improving log salvaging bill

Nov 05, 2005 - 10:50:03 pm PST

Congressmen Brian Baird, D-Wash., and Greg Walden, R-Ore., have teamed up to inject some common sense into a salvage logging process that often drags on until there is none of the burned or downed timber is worth salvaging. The two congressmen introduced legislation last Thursday that would expedite the review and appeals process to ensure both a timely harvest of dead trees and an environmentally sound reforestation of the fire- or wind-damaged area.

Washington, D.C.-based environmental groups reacted to this proposed Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act in typical knee-jerk fashion. Baird says the attacks began even before the bill had been written. They continued last week, with the spokeswoman for one group going so far as to suggest that the legislation would encourage logging interests to set fires to create salvaging opportunities.

To be fair, legitimate environmental concerns were raised by more responsible critics, as Baird and Walden worked to put this bill together. The congressmen have tried to accommodate them.

For example, some environmental groups worried that the legislation would be used by timber interests to create new roads in remote forests. Baird and Walden included a prohibition on the construction of new roads in the bill. Temporary roads created in the restoration of a forest would have to be removed upon completion of the project.

Environmentalists also were concerned that the legislation would result in the creation of "forest plantations. Baird and Walden wrote the bill so as to strictly prohibit the replanting of forest plantations. The legislation requires the establishment of native or beneficial plants in accordance with an approved forest or resource management plan.

The bill also prohibits the harvest of any green, or live, timber. This is not a backdoor attempt to get at old growth and other live timber that now is off limits. The legislation clearly is intended only to speed a review and appeals process that now can take years to complete, allowing insects and rot to claim dead trees that otherwise could have been salvaged for home construction and other purposes.

The bill will get a hearing next Thursday before the House Resources forestry subcommittee. We think the more lawmakers and other concerned observers hear about this legislation, the more they'll be inclined to embrace it as a sensible plan to fix a process that's clearly broken.